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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000043

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA;

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER DISCUSSES NIGERIAN CURRENT
POLITICAL EVENTS

REF: A. 09 ABUJA 2340

[1](#)B. 09 ABUJA 2260

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty
for reasons in sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In a meeting with PolOffs on January 11, key opposition leader and former Sokoto State Governor Attahiru Bafarawa recounted his recent arrest by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for alleged corruption, outlined the "Mega-Party" National Democratic Movement's (NDM) next steps in strengthening opposition to the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), opined that ailing President Yar'Adua needs advice more than prayers, and said Vice President Jonathan should demonstrate greater leadership during the President's absence. END SUMMARY.

RECENT RUN-IN WITH EFCC

[1](#)2. (C) Bafarawa said friends close to the Federal Government warned him that the government was unhappy with his political statements and that he should not return to Nigeria from Saudi Arabia, where he was performing the hajj. But Bafarawa said he felt he had a duty to return. He recounted that the EFCC had arrested him December 9 during an opposition "mega party" planning meeting (Ref B) without a warrant or documentation and held him for seven days. He challenged his arrest and detention at the Federal High Court in Abuja and the court authorized his release on bail. Nonetheless, the EFCC took him to Sokoto where he underwent immediate arraignment despite an ongoing strike by judiciary staff. Bafarawa claimed authorities did not notify him of the charges against him until he appeared in court. He then remained in prison for five days before gaining release on bail. Bafarawa said he viewed his arrest by the EFCC as sheer intimidation engineered by the ruling party, given his position in the opposition. Bafarawa also provided PolCouns and PolOff with copies of documents purporting to show that he had left a substantial surplus in the Sokoto state treasury for his successor.

"MEGA PARTY" PLANS

13. (C) According to Bafarawa, National Democratic Movement (NDM) leaders awaited recommendations from the Strategy and Contact Committees before deciding upon the best organizational structure for establishing the so-called "mega party." He noted that forming a new party would involve a lengthy process, but changing the name of an existing party could take only about a month. Bafarawa insisted that the opposition possesses greater popular support than currently apparent, because many Nigerians remained uncomfortable with leaving the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) until they became confident that the "mega party" would succeed. He acknowledged concerns by the public that former Head of State Mohammadu Buhari, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, and he may be continuing to vie for power and the mega party's presidential nomination. He claimed, however, that none will put their personal ambitions ahead of the nation or the party. He insisted that all three would respect the candidate who emerged from the party's nomination process.

YAR'ADUA'S PROLONGED ABSENCE

14. (C) Bafarawa characterized the Nigerian people as behaving stupidly for their collective complacency and acceptance of lack of information on President Yar'Adua's health and his absence of 50-plus days. He said he recently spoke with Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Yayale Ahmed at a mosque in Saudi Arabia, and Ahmed confided to him that even he had not seen the President after six days in Jeddah. Bafarawa opined that the President did not need

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prayers, but rather sound advice. He called Yar'Adua "wicked" for his lack of leadership, despite having sworn on the Koran that he would uphold the Constitution. Moreover, he characterized the Yar'Adua administration as the "most corrupt" government in Nigerian history.

15. (C) Bafarawa criticized Vice President Jonathan for the current political impasse. He averred that Jonathan should exercise leadership by refusing to undertake any presidential duties until he gained designation as acting president. In this way, Jonathan could bring the government to a standstill and expose the selfish maneuverings of the President's inner circle. Bafarawa insisted that the Vice President could not legally undertake some of the activities that he had performed, including presiding over Federal Executive Council (Cabinet) meetings. He accused the ministers of using this opportunity to approve major infrastructure contracts whose thresholds only the President could approve. In this manner, Bafarawa insisted, Jonathan had engaged in illegal actions that could expose himself to impeachment proceedings. Bafarawa insisted that, unlike the former SGF, whom Yar'Adua fired after he behaved more ambitiously than the President desired during a previous absence, the Vice President need not worry about backlash from the President, should he return alive from Saudi Arabia, because the President lacked authority to remove his Vice President. Both had come to power on the same political party ticket, albeit in a fashion that Bafarawa still considered illegitimate. He said the Vice President had yet to prove himself ready to assume the presidency. (COMMENT: Most observers have criticized Vice President Jonathan for taking the opposite approach -- i.e., acting too cautiously in assuming presidential powers. END COMMENT.)

COMMENT

16. (C) Bafarawa will likely play a major role -- along with Buhari and Atiku in the formation of the opposition "mega party." The ultimate strength of such a party will depend upon whether these three individuals, in particular, can

overcome their differences and unite behind a single candidate. While we reserve judgment over the accuracy of the EFCC charges against Bafarawa, the documents he presented (if accurate) would seem to show that EFCC action against him is politically motivated. END COMMENT.

SANDERS